

ADVICE

TO A

YOUNG CLERGYMAN,

UPON HIS ENTERING INTO

PRIEST'S ORDERS.

IN

SIX PASTORAL LETTERS.

BY A

DIVINE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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## LETTERS, &c.

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### LETTER I.

DEAR SIR !

I DID not think of giving you any advice for the regulation of your conduct in the clerical life, till I understood that you had repeated your former solemn vows and engagements, by your admission into priest's orders; and, even now, I know the difficulty of suggesting any thing, however important in itself, that may be called advice, to young minds, who will be apt to put an unfavourable construction upon the best intended counsel; and, if ever it should in the least thwart their inclination, they will reject it with scorn, by miscalling a friendly rebuke

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an



an unfriendly reproach. I am sensible, too, of the different sense which old age gives of many things, from that which is felt during the ardor of youth. But I will venture, notwithstanding: for, if any thing that I can urge, should by chance open your eyes to *see* any mistake, it may possibly open your heart to *correct* it. And if the advice should be irksome, yet let it not be offensive; for remember, *the wounds of a friend are better than the kisses of an enemy*. I mean only to conduct you as a friend, not to dictate to you as a censor. I wish you to *feel* the dignity of your character, that you may preserve it.

It gave me pleasure to find that you had not repented of your unfeigned assent to the several doctrines and ordinances of the established church, but rather that you had confirmed that assent in the presence of God, and in the most awful place of the sanctuary, at the altar, in the most explicit terms that can well be devised, of regard to its stated service, to which you have again promised strictly to conform, upon the principles of an unbiaſsed and well-informed conscience.

I would not be understood by this, to give the least countenance to a prevailing opinion,  
which



which I think an unfounded one, that a deacon may withdraw from the ministry, if he have proceeded no further. I do not know what could have given rise to such an opinion, for I am sure it is a dangerous one, and the more so, because it is deceitful. Indeed, I am persuaded, that it neither can, nor ought to be done. My reasons are these:—a Deacon is solemnly dedicated to the service of God, and appropriated to the sacred offices and duties of the Church; and there does not appear any sufficient authority, after this, that may enable him to alienate himself from it. I see no difference between a Deacon and a Priest in this respect. The form of ordination is to both alike, in the nature of a stipulation or covenant made at the altar between the same parties; for in both, the Church, in the name of Christ, confers holy orders, upon certain promises first made on the part of the candidates for them. Nor do I apprehend that the bishop himself can release them from this obligation: for their ordination-vows are binding always, or never. If their faith, plighted to God and his Church, in the most express and plainest terms possible, will bind; if promises given at the altar do

oblige; and if a stipulation, in the consideration of which orders are given, be sacred, and of an indispensable obligation, then I am sure that he who has once taken upon himself the sacred office, can never divest himself of it again; nor have I a doubt, that the Deacon can ever appear in a lay-habit, without incurring the censures of the Church, or infringing upon the Bishop's jurisdiction, by such a deviation from the authority of both.

The office of a Deacon is so different now from what it was in its original appointment, that this alone might determine the impracticability of laying it aside.—The very first question that is put to a Deacon at his ordination, “Do you trust that you are moved by the Holy Ghost?” And his answer, “I trust so,” is enough to convince him, if he has any sense of the meaning of it, or does not mean to trifle with so solemn a declaration, that it will admit of no change in his own mind, or that he *lies to the Holy Ghost*, if it does. It doubtless implies a zeal for promoting the glory of God, and the advancement of religion; a zeal for the good of souls, and a desire, which he feels, to de-

dicate his life and labours to those ends. This it is to be moved by the Holy Ghost; so that to renounce his mission, is to renounce his Christianity, and together with that, every good principle by which he had been governed before: and every one who ventures to give the answer, without resolving to persist in it, is a sacrilegious profaner of the name of God, by thus prevaricating in the first word that he says, in order to his admittance into the office, and then blasphemes the Holy Spirit of God by his wantonly relinquishing it: surely, then, the tie is too strong to admit of such a violation of a sacred covenant. It is a degradation, I could almost call it an excommunication, and can come only by way of severe punishment, for some heinous offence, from the hand of the Bishop, who has established and sealed the solemn compact between the Church and its Minister. It cannot be in the Minister's power alone to dissolve it at will, for this would be to destroy its nature, and break through every obligation, divine and human.

I do not quite know whether I am singular in this opinion or not; but I am sure it



is reasonable; and I am as sure, that it will be of service to have it ascertained, as many have run into the opposite opinion, to their visible detriment; possibly to their utter destruction: for, of all men, they are apt to relax most fatally, who think that they have thrown off the shackles of restraint which held them before in bondage.

If the assent and consent which you have given, and for the sincerity of which you call God to witness, mean any thing, it must mean, that you will, with an unfeigned simplicity of heart, strictly adhere to that mode of worship which is prescribed by the several rules and orders contained in the rubrics that are dispersed throughout the Liturgy, or Common-Prayer of our Church, as it is by law established. You will therefore remember, that there is no reserve left for the arbitrary use, or occasional omission of any part of this form; if it be not faithfully repeated every time that it ought to be used, it becomes a breach of your ordination-engagement, and falls very little, if any thing, short of perjury.

I mention this circumstance to you with the greater earnestness, because I know it is  
become



become customary among many of your younger unthinking brethren, to mutilate the service in several parts of it, either through hurry, or through contempt, to the great scandal of every pious attendant, and the still greater offence to Almighty God; as if the time spent in the house of prayer were the only lost time of their lives. They do not seem to be aware of their being employed in an application to the great God above; or that it is in behalf of their own and the petitioners' souls: the meanest object upon earth, upon the most trifling concern, could not be addressed with a more contemptuous disregard, than is thus shewn to his sacred presence.

It is no matter what objections may be raised by unreasonable disputers against the Form itself: the wisdom of our forefathers digested it well; and you have, I hope, upon mature deliberation, given your unfeigned assent to it. It is to no purpose, after this, or a bad one, to cavil at some particulars, or to try to raise to yourself difficulties about the propriety or impropriety of them. Do not presume, by searching out for these, to set up your own opinion against the judgment of th

most discerning men ; but modestly acquiesce in a practice which has the sanction of the highest authority for the use of it, and your own promise of conformity.

If you imagine that the Liturgy contains any doctrine of faith, of which you are not thoroughly convinced, examine its truth with all the carefulness you are able, and with all the assistance that the best expositors of the Christian faith can afford you. I doubt not, if your mind be open to conviction, but you will meet with satisfaction in every point; but if you cannot gain thus much, be conscientious enough to lay aside the use of it, and never dissemble with God in a matter of such infinite concern to your eternal salvation, as that of praying to him in words which you condemn in your heart. This is such a solemn piece of mockery, as will make even your prayers an abomination in his sight, and turn your religious service, as you pretend to call it, into sin.

Besides this, consider the welfare of your parishioners a little. Perhaps they may implicitly pin their faith upon your's. The care of their souls is committed to you ; and that care you have voluntarily taken upon yourself,

yourself, with a promise of performing it religiously. Do you perform this as you ought, when you exhort them to the devout use of a service which you do not approve? And if they discover this, either by your indifferent repetition, or scrupulous omission of some parts of it, you must forfeit your character among them; your ministry after that will avail them nothing; and you must thenceforward pass for either an hypocrite, which you cannot deny, or for an ignorant man, which you would wish to avoid. For none but an hypocrite would engage in a service for which he has no affection; and nothing but ignorance would suffer you to subscribe to a doctrine which you cannot defend; and if you think it indefensible, you are still worse; for then you not only prevaricate with omniscience, but with conscience too, both which you pretend to revere: and what is this, but *to play with firebrands, arrows, and death; and to say, am I not in sport?*

I know that there is one part of our established form in particular, which gives more real or imaginary offence to some members of the Church than any other; and upon that  
account,



account, you may be tempted by their insinuations to omit it, at some of the times prescribed for the use of it : I mean the Athanasian Creed. But if this be done by you, in mere compliance with the popular errors, or heretical principles of others, even against your own conviction, beware of such a requisition. You run the hazard, by such an omission, of having your own faith called in question, and you put your insincerity beyond all doubt. Let some blame, and others commend you, for this ; you have bound yourself by your own declaration to use it ; and that is above all other considerations of reproach or censure.

It may be possible that you cannot satisfy the scruples of every half-informed quibbler upon the points contained in this very ancient creed : it is the fashion, no one can give a good reason why, to decry this rule of faith, although every sentence of it is founded upon scripture, and may be proved from thence : and, although it is the most valuable bulwark we have against many dangerous heresies, considered, as it ought, in the general tendency or particular explanation of the doctrines contained in it. And what makes



makes this still more ridiculous is, that the same doctrines are expressed in as exceptionable language, if it must be called such, in other parts of the service, which yet are constantly repeated without any scruple. For what is there more offensive in this creed, which is so freely condemned, than is to be found in other parts of the Liturgy, which have been highly extolled as the most complete patterns of Christian devotion? Witness that most excellent hymn of our daily service, called, the *Te Deum*; and that occasional collection of devout supplications, *The Litany*; in the former of which the divinity of God the Son, is established almost throughout, by our religious addresses to him in several versicles; and in the latter, the Godhead of the three persons in the Trinity is distinctly recognized in separate applications to each person; and in the next, to the whole undivided Trinity, as *three Persons and one God*. The very doctrine which it is nearly the whole purpose of the Creed to establish, and the chief aim of its oppugners to defame.

We live in an age when men think themselves at full liberty to propagate whatever notions they please, under the pretence of thinking

thinking freely; and accordingly, determine as dogmatically about the nature of the Godhead and its relations, as if they had been more fully initiated into the mystery than Christ himself was, and could comprehend the whole of its infinite perfections, in a far better sense than they do, whom they condemn for treating it as incomprehensible: and yet, because it is so, they will condemn them still more for pretending to explain that in a scriptural way, which they undertake to explain in their own way. If they object to us the presumption of making the three persons in the Godhead equal; is it not full as presumptuous in them to degrade the nature of two of those persons, by which they sacrifice the dignity of the Son and Holy Ghost to the honour of the Father, and yet accuse us of impiety for daring to give equal honour to all? We think they must be equal, because the Scriptures have said it; they think they are unequal, because they judge that they must be so. If we are in the wrong, still we must be safe: if they be in the wrong, they risque their all; for they lose their Redeemer and Sanctifier. The Unitarian principle will admit but of one God; the Trinitarian principle

ciple admits the same; but this does not divide the Godhead; it maintains a diversity of persons which the others confound; but it does not divide the substance which they venture to mutilate. But this Creed will fall under your consideration again, especially what are called the more offensive parts of it. But, in truth, if every thing were to be altered or omitted, even in the Common-Prayer, which some one in a large congregation should object to, there would be very little left for the use of others, even among the objectors themselves. They therefore *come together not for the better, but for the worse, as long as there are these divisions among them.*

For your direction in the important duty of Common-Prayer, you are furnished with such Rubrics as, if well attended to, cannot fail of guiding you aright upon every occasion relative to the public worship of the Church. They are in general so explicit and precise, that they are fitly calculated to fulfil St. Paul's rule exactly, that *all things* in the administration of our daily service might be done *decently and in order*. As these were framed for your guides in this matter, you  
are



are as strictly obliged to follow them, as you can be to observe any part of external worship which ought to be the faithful transcript of the internal devotion of the heart. But for want of due attention to these Rubrics, many mistakes have often arisen in the course of the *daily ministration*.

You are commanded by the very first Rubric, to pronounce it with an audible voice; for without this, the purpose of reading it at all is defeated; and you must *pray*, as well as *read* it deliberately, otherwise you are mocking the Almighty under the guise of worshipping. You *worship him with your lips*, but *the heart* seems to be *far from him*.

I would not have mentioned this little circumstance, as you may call it, did I not know, that some of the younger clergy are apt to set out with this careless inattention to what they are engaged in, to the neglect of their own characters, and the manifest prejudice of their congregation, who are too inclined to transfer this indifference in them to the service itself; and when they find, by the manner of performing it, that it makes no suitable impression upon themselves, will conceive a notion, that there can be no great solemnity



lemnity in the composition of those prayers, upon which they lay so little stress; and therefore, as long as you are not affected by the pious sentiments contained in those prayers, will never find them out by themselves.

Hence arises that want of attention in your flock, so justly complained of, who will slumber over the prayers, whilst you are not careful enough to rouse them from it, by a becoming repetition of them. They will not enter with devotion into the spirit of those prayers, which you shew such a lukewarmness in delivering, as if there were neither spirit nor devotion in them. I wish that all this, with all the dreadful consequences, might not be applicable to some of longer standing, whom the constant repetition of the same things so often, in one day, has made inattentive to the importance of them. But it will require very little pains, and take up very little more of their time, to remedy these abuses. The service itself certainly deserves a more decent performance of it; and if carefully examined, or understood in all its devotional exercises, will never tire a religious man.

Where

Where there is no express rubric, there may seem to be some discretionary power left in the officiating minister to supply it ; and this perhaps may sometimes be used with an impropriety, that he is not aware of. One instance of this immediately occurs in the different custom, which different men have practised, of introducing the office for *churching of women* into the communion service ; some at the end of the second lesson, and others just before the general thanksgiving ; and this for the sake of applying that sentence, which relates to the particular case of those, who have been prayed for, and which therefore cannot possibly apply to the present case ; especially, as thanksgivings have already been offered up for the person, who has been delivered from the danger of childbirth, and can want no repetition ; whereas this, in the general thanksgiving, is not to be used, but in behalf of those, who here before requested the prayers of the congregation, in their affliction, and now wish to avail themselves of returning the thanks of the same congregation, joined with their own, for their recovery from it. Nothing can be more different than the two cases ; and therefore the appli-

application of the same form to both, must appear to be improper.

You will ask then, where is this part of the service to be introduced? I answer, that it is a totally distinct office of itself, and therefore they seem to be the most correct, who use it by itself, without blending it with the other parts of the service: upon which account it probably was, that no particular direction is given in the rubric about the place of introducing it: nevertheless, if it must be introduced at all, as perhaps it may answer this good purpose, that they, who come to offer up this particular thanksgiving may, at the same time, have the benefit of the other prayers, which are daily administered; if, I say, it must be introduced at all, it seems to be the least interruption of the public form, to use it after the second lesson, when there is not that immediate connexion with that and what follows, as there is between the general supplication and the general thanksgiving, as they both stand in the Liturgy.

But for my own part, I must think, that it was meant to be a distinct service, detached from every other part, as much as that for the burial of the dead, or the baptism of in-



fants, or matrimony, which are seldom, and ought never to be intermixed with the rest of the stated form; for in truth they cannot with any propriety \*.

There is another instance, in which the Rubric is too frequently neglected altogether, though it is very explicit in its direction, and in general, may easily be complied with: I mean that after the communion-service. It is there enjoined, that "on Sundays and Holy-days, although there be no communion, yet all shall be said that is appointed at the communion, until the end of the general prayer for *the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth*; together with one or more of the collects at the end of the communion-office, concluding with the blessing." In the first book of King *Edward* this Rubric ordered expressly, that this part of the service should be read at the altar, though afterwards, to

\* Bishop *Sparrow* says, "This service is to be done betwixt the first and second service, as I have learnt by some bishops' inquiries at their visitation; the reason perhaps is, because by this means it is no interruption of either of these offices." *Rational*, p. 315. This implies, and indeed so does the Rubric, that it should be confined to Sundays and Holy-days, either when the communion is administered, or part of the service is used.



put a stop to some disputes about it, this direction was left out. Nevertheless, as another Rubric at the beginning of this office still orders, that *the priest should stand at the north side of the table*, and there repeat the Lord's Prayer with what follows, and no allowance or permission added to say it elsewhere, several of the bishops, at their visitations, enjoined their clergy to read it at the communion-table: and as long as the first Rubric continues in force, I cannot see how they can have the liberty to read it in the desk, as is frequently done, even in places, where they might, with great convenience, remove from the desk to the altar, during the singing of a psalm between the two services. In small country parishes indeed, where there may be no psalm, some allowance may be made, but in all other places, there does not seem to be the least objection to it, and there is a plain reason, from the words of the Rubric, why it ought to be done. One thing is certain, that the very place will command a superior devotion, and add solemnity to the performance.

If you would see more of the usefulness and propriety of the several Rubrics, you may

consult *Archdeacon Sharp's Charges* upon them.

Indeed, the whole composition of what is called the Liturgy, is so replete with the true spirit of prayer, and so conformable to the doctrines and practice of the first, most venerable churches of christianity, that if the God above is any where worshipped in *the beauty of holiness*, it is in the established church of this kingdom. I do not mean, though I well might, as it is merely a set form of prayer, but as it is the best of the kind, that ever was composed by men, who were not divinely inspired. Not that the compilers of it disdained to transcribe into their own form any devout prayer, which they found in the use of the church before the reformation; for several of the prayers, and several of the collects are taken whole, and some others in part from the Roman Missal: but I know of no objection, but what prejudice may suggest, to the admitting of a good prayer, whether it be used by one church or another, or from whatever church it is taken \*.

I doubt

\* Dr. Bennet says, that about one fourteenth part of the Common Prayer, is taken from those books, the Popish Liturgies. About one tenth part of our Litany, and  
about

I doubt not, however, but you are well convinced of the utility and even necessity of a set form of prayer, not only because it rests upon the authority and example of Christ himself, who prescribed one, which he left for the continual use of all his followers, even unto the end of the world; but also because the effusions of an unpremeditated prayer, like an extempore sermon, may unwarily become so incoherent in the conception, and so confused in the utterance, as to degrade the solemnity of prayer, and may insult the Majesty of heaven, by offering up some indigested petitions to the throne of grace. For such was the determination of an ancient council, (that of Milevis, Can. 12.) “No prayers should be used publicly, but those that are prescribed; lest through ignorance or carelessness, any thing contrary to the faith should be vented or uttered before God, or offered up to him in the church.”

In a set form of prayer, the circumstances of every individual in the congregation, will probably fall in with the subject of one prayer

about one eleventh part of the Communion Office. See his Appendix, N<sup>o</sup> 1. to his Paraphrase upon the Common Prayer.



or another, or some may be so conceived as to become the general petitions of all, so as to excite the devotion, which comes more immediately from the heart, and therefore will be the more sensibly felt there: but an unpremeditated prayer, left to the discretion of the minister, may or may not reach to the particular or private wants of any one who hears it; and if it should not, as far as he is not concerned in it, to him it is no more, than *a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*. In consequence of this, he will become indifferent to the subject-matter of it; and as his posture, while it is repeated, indicates no inward sign of devotion, it passes off without attention, and therefore without profit. For it can never be allowed, that any one should offer up to God a prayer in the name of the congregation, as their joint desire, to which they had never before consented themselves, nor their governors, whom Christ has empowered to provide such, as are proper for them. Such a liberty would neither be granted nor taken in a matter of infinitely inferior concern. No man would venture to present a petition to an earthly sovereign, in the names of the inhabitants of the town where he lives,

to

to which they had no opportunity of giving their consent beforehand, or which they had not so much as seen or heard before it was presented: nor would they allow it to be their's.

If after this we were to descend to particulars, which will shew you the excellency of our Liturgy in the strongest light, I could not do better, than to refer you to *Dr. Bisse's* four sermons *on the beauty of holiness in the Common Prayer*, or to *Mr. Wheatly's illustration and defence of it*, in all its branches. For it is my meaning, as I go along, to mention the authors, where you will find what I may only hint at, fully discussed; that you may gather from the whole a list of writers, who will furnish you with a body of divinity, both speculative and practical. The former of these authors will point out to you the excellencies of the Common Prayer in its daily use; and the latter, the propriety of all its ceremonies. There is not an usage throughout the whole, which he does not defend with great acuteness from the practice or testimony of the primitive christians; nor is there a single article inserted in the Rubrics, or in the body of it, which he does not prove

to be found in its proper place, with the utmost significancy. You will of course read the whole for your own satisfaction, and that you may *be ready to give an answer* to those, who will object to it.

Such objectors there are, and even in the present day ; to some of whom it appears to be too prolix, and to others too confused. In order to obviate its prolixity and confusion, it is well known, that at one time the service was divided into three parts—the Common Prayer—the Litany—and the Communion Service—but the inconveniencies that arose from this division, by some chusing to attend one part, and some another, together with the bustle that was made, in large congregations more especially, by the people passing and repassing during the short intervals between each service, were so great, that it was judged more expedient to join them together again; by leaving out three prayers, the substance of which was to be found in the invocations of the Litany; and by appointing a short resting place, between the Litany and the Communion, for psalmody, which would relieve the mind, and yet raise the pious affections of the worshippers.



I cannot omit the mention of another book upon the Liturgy, not of the same nature with the foregoing, but a very useful one of its kind, which I could wish you likewise to recommend to your parishioners, who may be profited by it. I mean Dr. *Nichols upon the Common Prayer*, which has a concise, pious commentary throughout the whole, very explanatory, and easy to be understood, which is extended to the psalms too, as well as to the several offices, and opens to every common reader the design, for which each was penned, and the meaning of each verse separately with the utmost perspicuity.

But I have not yet done with this subject, till I shall have pointed out to you, in another letter, the peculiar excellencies of this stated form, and in some degree justified the doctrines, which it teaches; only observing in general, what I wish to leave upon your mind at present, that in this, the best copy of primitive devotion, outward decency is preserved and adjusted to the several parts of it; and inward piety is admirably kept up, by reminding us, at the beginning of every prayer, of the reverend name, or some awful perfection of the Lord our God, as the encouraging ground

ground of our praying to him ; and at the conclusion, of the merits and mediation of the Redeemer, as the only means of success, which we can promise to ourselves in praying. Wherein every collect is fitted, with the most exact propriety, to the season or occasion of its being used ; each containing a distinct, well-managed petition by itself ; in so short a compass, that it is impossible it should weary ; but withal so pertinent, that it is impossible it should not appear interesting. But it would be endless to dwell upon every excellency ; I will pronounce upon the whole, that it is the most precious treasure of rational devotion in the whole world ; and if any thing be wanting in it, it is only one short prayer more, which every one is able to supply, “ that God may vouchsafe to continue  
 “ the use of it in honor and veneration, so  
 “ long as he has promised to be with his  
 “ church ; even unto the end of the world.”

## LETTER II.

I SHALL now resume the subject, as I promised you, relating to some of the peculiar excellencies of our Common-Prayer. I do not mean to go through the whole service, for that has been sufficiently done by others, but I shall chiefly confine myself to those parts which have given rise to some controversy concerning the use of them, and more especially, concerning the doctrines contained in them; by which you will readily understand, that I shall dwell principally upon the Creeds; for these are, as their name implies, the *credenda* of every Christian.

You cannot begin your devotional addresses to God better than with some well-chosen sentences from his own word. This collection of them, from whence the Minister may select one or more, is so framed, as to lead forcibly to an affectionate exhortation to the people to join with you in the humiliating confession of a penitent sinner, who sees the necessity of acknowledging and  
lamenting



lamenting his manifold transgressions to his offended God, before he can hope for that absolution and remission of them, which the Priest is commissioned to pronounce from the mouth of God to all those who truly repent, as such may be presumed to repent of their sins, which they thus lament and confess, as the terms of forgiveness. After this properly follows the Lord's Prayer, which comprehends every spiritual and temporal want, a supply of all good things, and a defence against all evil things, which we are encouraged to ask when the heart is thus prepared to receive or repel them.

The Psalm, which is ordered to be repeated almost daily, and the other Psalms, which are judiciously portioned out for the use of each day in the month, so as to go through the whole collection of them twelve times in the year, contain the pious effusions of a heart entirely devoted to the glory of his Maker, and therefore cannot be too frequently inculcated upon the hearts of those, who, like him, *meditate upon God's laws day and night*, that they may, like him too, *praise the Lord with all their souls, and sing praises unto the honour of his name.*

In

In the Psalms there are many historical references to the Old Testament, and many prophetical allusions to the New; both tending to prepare our minds for the lessons that follow out of each, appointed by the calendar to be read on every day throughout the year. For, by the appointment of one every morning from the Old Testament, and of another from the New, we are at the same time instructed out of the Law and the Gospel, and in the evening from the Epistles; all which together will comprehend the substance of the Jewish religion, and history, as delivered in the Law; the gradual opening of the Prophecies, which all lead to the grand point of the Messiah, promised and foretold from the beginning to the end; the history of the life, miracles, and death of Jesus Christ, by which the Prophecies became fulfilled, together with his resurrection and ascension, which had been typified in the Jewish dispensation; and the saving articles of the Christian faith discussed and inculcated by the Apostles in their several Epistles; so that the people may hear what they want to know, what they are bound to believe, and what they ought to practise; that is, the whole

whole duty of a Christian from the word of God.

After the Lessons from the Scriptures, it was always customary in the primitive Churches, to add a hymn expressive of their thankfulness to the Almighty for that gracious revelation of his will to mankind, which they had just before heard. And if all the devotional collections of antiquity for this purpose had been ransacked, there could not have been found one more suitable than that which was chosen; I mean the *Te Deum*; the noblest and most exalted hymn of devotion known to this Church, or any Church in the world, in which angels and the blessed spirits above may well join with us in the solemn strains of praise and thanksgiving, adoration and worship, which it contains.

It is most probable that *St. Ambrose* was the author of this excellent hymn, as he was of many others in the same pious style. It is more directly levelled against the heresy of the Arians, as *St. Austin* affirms all his were. It is calculated by its frame and composition to be sung in the Church, as his used to be; and



and it is exactly in his manner of writing them in short sentences.

It begins with a solemn address of universal praise to God the Father, wherein all the inhabitants of heaven and earth are accustomed to join in the words, more especially of the *Trisagium*, or cherubical hymn, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory!* which was usually sung as an explicit declaration of their belief in the Trinity; and agreeably to the sense of this, *the holy Church, throughout all the Christian world*, is represented as acknowledging the *infinite majesty of the Father*, of *the true and only Son*, and of *the Holy Ghost, the Comforter*.

After this mention of the whole Trinity by their several names, by an elegant apostrophe, it directs our praises more particularly to *Christ, the King of Glory*, as the *everlasting Son of the Father*, the Son incarnate of the Virgin, who thereby debased himself from his original glory, that he might exalt all believers in him; who is now seated at the right-hand of God, in the glory of the Father, of which he had been partaker before the foundation of the world; and  
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who will come again in the same nature, which he had condescended to assume for our sakes, to judge the quick and the dead.

Thus divine in his nature, thus eminent in his mediatorial relation to us, the prayers of the congregation are immediately directed to this Redeemer of the world for help, that they may be qualified, by virtue of his redemption, to be numbered among the saints in glory everlasting: and for this end, they join in magnifying him day by day, and worshipping his name ever, world without end, that he may vouchsafe to keep them, by his Almighty power from sin, and have mercy upon them, because they had always trusted in him; and now they pray that they may not be confounded by any failure of duty on their part, nor deprived of the hopes of God's mercy, which they can only hope for through his mediation and merits.—Surely there cannot be conceived a more Christian creed, or a more animated pattern of Christian devotion than this!

But though this may well be looked upon as a summary of the Christian faith, in the form of a hymn, yet has the Church wisely furnished us with other creeds, which were  
anciently

anciently called the symbols, or rules of faith, whereby the true Christian might be distinguished from the false friends or open enemies of the Catholic communion.

If you are inclined to trace the history of the creeds up to their origin, you must go back to the times of the Apostles themselves. For when they separated from each other at Jerusalem for their respective missions, it is most probable, that they settled some *rule of faith* for their future preaching, as a common standard, lest they should be suspected of expounding different doctrines to their Christian converts in different places. In this sense, the Creed, which goes under their name, may properly enough be called apostolical ; forasmuch as it is uniformly consonant to what they preached every where, and fully contained the sum and substance of their whole faith.

For whether we believe, as some do, that the Apostles' Creed was composed by them before they parted from each other or not, yet, it is certain, that they had a fixed summary, or *canon of faith*, drawn up for their common use, which was committed to all such persons as were appointed to the sacred

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offices of the church, and was to be delivered by them again in charge, as a holy *depositum*, to their successors in the ministry; that so an uniformity might be preserved in what they taught, and that none of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith might be disguised or perverted by its own professors.

This was that *form of sound words*, which St. Paul commanded Timothy *to commit to faithful men*, who might be instructed by such a formulary *to teach others also*. 2 Tim. chap. ii. ver. 2. This he elsewhere calls *the form of doctrine, that was delivered*. Rom. vi. 17. and St. Jude, the *deposit of faith, which was once delivered to the saints*. Jude ver. 3. understanding by the word *once*, as many commentators have, that standard of faith, by which they had uniformly conducted their preaching from the very first, and which they commanded to be kept so entire and uncorrupt, that nothing essential might be added to it, or taken from it.

That this practice of the Apostles continued in use among their immediate successors, there is no doubt; for most of the articles of this Creed are recorded in the  
Epistles

Epistles of *Ignatius*, who lived with several of them; and the whole form, as it now stands in our Liturgy, is to be found in the works of St. *Ambrose* and *Ruffinus*, who both flourished in the fourth century.

I do not dwell upon the articles themselves; for if you have not already, it is indispensibly necessary that you should read, and that with great attention, Bishop *Pearson's* exposition of this Creed throughout.

In the ages after the apostolical, when heretics arose from different quarters to disturb the peace of the Church, and by their different principles to unsettle the faith, which they could not destroy, it became necessary to be more explicit in the Church's determination upon the essential points, and to explain more fully those distinguishing articles, which were made the requisite qualification or test of those who were to be admitted into the visible Church, or were allowed, but not without a profession of these, to bear the name of Christians.

For this purpose, every Bishop was authorised at the first, to frame a Creed for the use of his own Church, and to express it in such terms as were best suited to meet with

the heresies that were most prevalent at that time or place, and from which he apprehended the greatest danger of apostacy. Hence it is, that we find so many different ways of expressing the same *rule of faith*, and the number of articles occasionally increased.

These formularies, which never failed to inculcate the belief of a Trinity in the Godhead, consistently with its unity, were designed originally for the instruction of catechumens before their baptism; for unless they would make this confession of their faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as three persons and one God, in the face of the Church, after their conversion, they were refused baptism: such was the declaration of the council of *Arles*, and afterwards of *Nice*, upon this occasion: "If they do not answer " to this doctrine of the Trinity, let them " not be baptized." And we are told, that the baptism of the *Marcionites* was rejected by the Eastern church, because they held heterodox notions concerning the Trinity.

Agreeably to this determination of the Catholic Church, it was, that *Athanasius* in his writings, looked upon all heretics of this



description as totally excluded from the saving benefits of the Christian faith, even because they were not, in his time, allowed so much as the name of Christians. Nor was he singular in this: *Lactantius* says, that the Arians are no Christians: (Instit. l. iv. c. 5.) *Hilary* says the same: (Hil. ad Instit. l. i.) so that you see that the doctrine of the Trinity in unity, and unity in Trinity, which is the substance of the Athanasian Creed, is the baptismal faith; and *that* certainly is necessary to salvation, if any faith be.

The damnatory clauses, as they are called, of the Athanasian Creed, have given more real or pretended offence to the oppugners of the Catholic faith, than any other part of our service: but if they would interpret them in the same spirit of moderation with which they were penned, perhaps all offence might be done away. The Creed itself is to be considered as no more than the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity guarded against the attacks of the several heresies which it was calculated to oppose in its several parts. This doctrine, as it was taught by the Church, was the chief term of church-communion, as it had always been requisite for admission into it.

Now it was a common saying among the primitive writers of that age, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*; there is no salvation out of the pale of the Church; whence it followed in their ideas, that the fundamental doctrine of the Trinity, and the very existence of the Church, as well as of the religion of Christ, must stand or fall together; whence it followed again, that the belief of the Catholic faith, thus understood, was adjudged as necessary to salvation as it was to be a Christian.

Upon this ground it is that in every ancient Creed transmitted down to us, of which there are many upon record, we find an anathema constantly denounced against those who dissented from the principal articles of it, because they were the essential articles of Christianity itself. But this anathema, which sounds so harsh to us at this distance, is explained by a canon of the council of *Gangra* in *Asia Minor*, which was held, most probably, so early as A. D. 324, or, at the latest date, in A. D. 340, to mean no more than an exclusion from the visible society of the Catholic Church; for so says the nineteenth canon, "Let him be anathema, that is, de-  
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“ clared excommunicate, or cut off from  
 “ the Church.” It must be allowed, how-  
 ever, that this was supposed to imply, that  
 as they denied the covenant of grace, by  
 denying its author, they would, likewise, if  
 they persisted in unbelief, be shut out from  
 the benefits of that covenant, and therefore  
 had nothing to trust to, but uncovenanted  
 mercy.

Baptism is the appointed rite, by which  
 admission is gained into that covenant wherein  
 we stand; but *that* Baptism was accounted  
 unavailable, which was not administered ac-  
 cording to the prescribed form, and with the  
 previous confession of the true faith, which  
 that form declared in the name of the Fa-  
 ther, Son, and Holy Ghost: and therefore  
 if this faith were necessary for Baptism, which  
 alone puts us into a state of salvation, then  
 may it well be said to be likewise necessary  
 to be believed for salvation; implying, too,  
 the reverse, that we cannot be saved upon the  
 terms of the Gospel dispensation without it.  
 From all which we cannot but conclude,  
 that this ancient Creed spoke no other lan-  
 guage than that of the former times, which  
 was consonant with that of the Scriptures;



and when it is understood as it ought, according to the received sense of that language, it conveys nothing but what every Christian, without the hazard of forfeiting his charity, may repeat.

I do not mean to enter into the discussion about the author or age of this primitive Creed, for a great deal that has been controverted concerning both might have been spared, if the disputers on both sides would but have relied upon the best evidence they could have upon the subject; and that is the authority of *Gregory Nazianzen*, a bishop of high repute in this very century, and therefore most likely to know as well as to speak the truth. He mentions this Creed in his *Orat. de Laud. Athanas.* *Orat.* 21. He calls it “a royal gift;” and expressly tells us, that *Athanasius* himself presented it to the Emperor *Jovinian*; and “that it was received “in his time, both by the Eastern and “Western Churches, as a treasure of inestimable price.”

The body of the Creed contains the sum and substance of all orthodox divinity, the doctrines of the Trinity, and incarnation of Jesus Christ, guarded against the innovations  
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of schismatics and heretics; together with the mysterious union of Godhead and manhood in one person, illustrated by the no less mysterious, though undoubted, union of soul and body, which none but the materialists, and scarcely they, can deny. All the rest is only an occasional enlargement of these fundamental articles, and therefore he, who believes these, virtually believes every other sentence of this Creed, which was added only to illustrate and secure the truth of these main points. These are the articles which are declared to be necessary to salvation; and the Scripture has declared the same; for the whole fabric of Christianity rests upon them. Surely then, none need be offended at the public repetition of it in our Churches; for it condemns none but those who will not believe and be saved.

I will only to add what I have said in behalf of this Creed, the opinion of the great reformer *Luther*, who has expressed himself in favour of it in very strong terms, in his treatise, *De tribus symbolis*: "It is," he says, "a firm bulwark to the Creed of the Apostles, and an excellent preservative against those bold and impious wretches, who are  
not

not ashamed to make a jest of a Trinity in unity, and to ridicule the incarnation of the only Son of God; two great and fundamental points, which this most holy and accurate system in some measure endeavours to illustrate, and with great solidity maintains."

In the Communion-service, the Nicene Creed is introduced after the Epistle and Gospel, as the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds were after the Lessons, for one and the same reason, that by the repetition of them, after the scriptures have been read, every member of the Church may with his own mouth, openly and distinctly make a confession of that faith which the Lessons had taught, and thereby evidence to the Church his firm belief in those articles, which have been always accounted the characteristic marks whereby to distinguish, as by a *Shibboleth*, the true believer from the heretic or infidel; for as one of the ancients calls it, "it is the mystery of our salvation." *Dionys. Eccles. Hierar. cap. iii.*

The third council of *Toledo*, can. ii. has given an additional reason why it is ordered to be recited by the people in this place, before the sacrament, which is in its own words,



words, "That the breasts of those that approach to those dreadful mysteries may be purified with a true and right faith."

The Nicene Creed is so called, because it is a paraphrase of that Creed which the fathers, assembled at the first general council of *Nice*, A. D. 325, drew up for the use of the Catholic church, containing the primary articles of Christian belief; but it was put into the present form by the second general council, held at *Constantinople*, A. D. 381; and therefore might as properly be stiled the *Constantinopolitan* Creed. It more largely condemns all heresies at that time sprung up in the Church, than the Apostles' Creed; and it more particularly establishes that fundamental doctrine of the *Homoousion*, or co-essentiality of God the Father, and God the Son; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.

I must particularly recommend to your perusal, Bishop *Bull's* defence of this Creed, and all his Latin works upon the subject.

## LETTER III.

I HAVE dwelt the longer upon the Creeds, that you may be *ready to give an answer to every one who asketh you a reason of the faith that is in you.* At your first entrance upon the work of the Ministry, you will meet with difficulties in combating the novel doctrines of those *who hold the faith in unrighteousness*, as well of those who have no faith at all.—You will find, that the Church of God is divided, and *the veil of the temple rent in twain*, by Enthusiasts on one side, and Unitarians on the other. Men, who pretend to be zealous advocates for the purity of adoration and worship to be paid to him, *who sitteth upon the throne*, and yet by a very preposterous mode of expressing it, would sacrifice *the Lamb, the Son of God*, to the honour of the Father. It must be your care to guard against both. Their misinterpretations of detached parts of Scripture may deceive you. Their high pretensions to the favour of Heaven may mislead you; or their furious zeal in the

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the cause of their own system of religion, which pretends to keep the majesty of Heaven inviolate, may betray you.

It is the work of the Ministry, for it is the commission itself, to convert some and confirm others; to vindicate the truth, and guard against error; to convince the gain-sayer, and correct the disorderly; to exhort the lukewarm with all diligence, and awaken the presumptuous with all earnestness; to direct the wavering with all caution, and admonish the careless with all meekness. For these ends, great and important as they are, the faithful dispenser of God's lively oracles, if he would *rightly divide the word of truth*, must *become all things*, in a lawful sense, *to all men, that so he may by all means, save some*.

If you consider, then, what it is you are to teach, and with how great circumspection you are bound to teach it, you will easily conceive that the compass of your knowledge must be extensive, and that the seasonable application of it requires prudence.—It may seem, and so it has been judged by some, that a knowledge of speculative truths, though revealed in the Scripture, is no necessary qualifi-



qualification for a preacher of righteousness; and, indeed, thus much may be allowed, that he who is not deeply conversant in these abstruse matters, may yet move usefully in a narrower sphere; for he may nevertheless *feed the growing flock of Christ with the sincere milk of the word*, and by the influence of a truly Christian example, persuade others to be *altogether Christians*. But still it is not fit that he should be ignorant of those great truths of religion, which relate to the grand mystery of man's redemption by Christ Jesus; and if he depend upon the efficacy of that redemption, or would have his hearers to depend upon it, it is not fit that he should be ignorant of the proofs of his Messiahship, or the satisfaction of his merits.

For this purpose he must, as it is said of *Apollos*, be *mighty in the Scriptures* of both Testaments, that he may rightly understand, by comparing both, what the one has foretold, and what the other testifies of his nature, his person, and his offices. For if he cannot satisfy himself that he was God as well as man, he cannot teach others that his atonement was available to their eternal salvation; or if he is not yet convinced that he

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was man as well as God, he cannot attempt to persuade others that the requisite atonement could ever have been made. For as God only, he could not have *laid down his life*, and as man only, he could not have had power to *take it again*. As both, indeed, he might *die for our sins, and rise again for our justification*; but take away either, and you destroy the whole divine œconomy of the Christian redemption at once.

This the Christian Minister ought not to be ignorant of; and in another light, he should be able to defend it. If Christ our Saviour be not perfect God, then have the whole Christian church, even the Apostles themselves, been idolaters from the beginning; for notwithstanding what is now confidently asserted to the contrary, they and all their followers from the very first age of it, have worshipped him as God, their enemies themselves being witnesses, for they have not failed to charge them with it, as their crime. And if he were not man, as well as God, (for heretics, like all men, who set out wrong, have run from one extreme to another), then have the whole Christian world been fatally deceived from the beginning; for  
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notwithstanding the testimony of eye-witnesses, and those divinely inspired, they have all along *believed a lie: yea, and they are found false witnesses of God.* Perhaps it may be thought, that such disquisitions, though they are the very first principles of the Gospel, may carry you too far into a wide field of *polemical* or *controversial* divinity, in an unprofitable pursuit after *science, falsely so called.* But from whatever quarter religion is attacked, there must be some guard fixed to resist the danger. Be not dismayed then at being told, that this too must be reckoned another requisite branch of your religious acquisitions; forasmuch as without some knowledge of this, duly cultivated, the *establishment* itself will be left defenceless, and all its collateral supports may be cast down.

The subject-matter of this part of divine literature, is that system of Christian faith and doctrine derived from the primitive ages of the Church, which has, with the utmost propriety, been made the approved test of your religious principles, and the consent to it the indispensable qualification for your admission into the sacred office. For every Church, as well as every other society, has a  
right



right of settling the terms of its own communion, that its ruling powers might not *lay hands suddenly on any man*. Thus did the primitive churches in the earliest ages, for their canons prove it; and all churches in every age, and of every denomination (even among the Dissenters themselves, who complain of its hardship), have used this right, as much for the safety of the people, who are to learn *what is truth*, as for the reputation of the Minister who is to teach them; neither of which could have been effectually provided for, if no inquiry were made what religious principles were maintained by the one, or what religious errors might possibly be infused into the others.

It will require no formal proof to convince you, that without an uniformity of faith and discipline, the whole ecclesiastical polity would sink into an irreligious anarchy. For what polity can subsist without laws; and what will laws avail if they are not equally binding upon every member of it? which again they cannot be but by an express promise, made subject to certain sanctions, if such promise should be violated. The Scripture, it is true, is of itself a complete rule of faith and practice; but experience has long ago

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proved that the Scripture, however sufficient in itself to make *the man of God perfect*, has been artfully wrested too much by false glosses and sinister interpretations to answer the purpose that might have been served by it; inasmuch as it has been alledged by the intrepid champions of a declining cause, to justify every heresy, and to patronize every schism by turns. Upon this account it was, that Creeds were framed in the first ages of the Church, formularies of confession afterwards, and articles of religion since, to guard as much as could be, against the united efforts of the heretic and the infidel, by such explicit declarations of the Catholic faith, as might preserve *the unity of it in the bond of peace*. For they gave some considerable advantage to the Christian cause at that time, and they have added not a little to that purity of tradition, by which we receive the holy oracles at this day.

These explications of mysterious truths did not arise from any arrogant presumption of being *wise above what is written*: they all stand upon the foundation of the Scripture-doctrine still; for it was never thought to be in the power of any man, or number of men,

men, either to increase or lessen the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, by inventing new ones; they only attempted to revive and enforce the original articles, which could not be gainfayed, unless it were by the introducing of such heresies as were purposely introduced to subvert the *established* standard of belief.

It is true, their enemies extorted these new expositions of the Catholic faith from them; and so far they were unwittingly the means of adding new supports to the Christian doctrines, which in their hearts they wished to overthrow. But we have one uncomfortable circumstance peculiar to ourselves, that *our enemies are they of our own household*. Our very watchmen have been instrumental in pulling down the fences of the vineyard, as if it were likely to bring forth the better fruit by having every plant of *wild grapes* planted in it, which might become the more luxuriant the less they were pruned.

Not that the Church meant to prescribe what system of faith, or what mode of worship every one should implicitly embrace from his heart, because he is required by a test to conform to one particular institution of uni-



formity before he can be admitted into its sacred function; for no Church whatever can claim this right over the conscience; but then it is the only expedient, as all confess, for preventing that corruption of faith, or distraction of opinion which might follow from the ignorance of some, or the bigotry of others. The Church cannot be said by this to lay a stumbling-block in the way of its members, as if it required an assent, which they were not always able to give; for surely it is no unreasonable demand to require any one to do what his own *professed* principles, as a member of the Church, lead him to do, without any violence done to his conscience, provided the conscience itself be sincere in what it professes; and if it be not, he is better out of the Church than in it.

Neither do we by this depreciate the use of private judgment in matters of religion, because we maintain a submission of this to public authority; every one is still at liberty to put himself under the discipline of an establishment or not. He will forfeit, indeed, the prerogatives that are annexed to it, as he would of any other society; and much better it is that he should, than prevaricate with

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God and the world for the sake of them. Least of all would we infringe upon the rights of toleration, which is the true bulwark of liberty of conscience, properly so called, and will be the glory of every establishment which allows it; perhaps we may add, that ours is the only one that does allow it: but then a toleration of those who differ from us in circumstantials only, is one thing, and a declaration that every one may and ought to be at full liberty to chuse whatever religion he pleases, even when essentials are concerned, is another. The one, if unlimited, has always been adjudged as an inlet to every heresy, the other, with its legal restrictions, as they are expressed in the act, is a barrier against it. Such a full licence would introduce so many different and discordant principles, still under the sanction of the same establishment, that as Bishop *Sherlock* somewhere expresses it, you would not be able to find the true religion in the crowd.

When the act of toleration was first enacted, we know the restrictions just now hinted at, which the wisdom of our forefathers led them to make in the act: every body was then perfectly satisfied with them; and the

reasons for making them are, I apprehend, still in full force, though many are now so openly murmuring against them. Liberty is fairly granted to all persons to act as their conscience shall direct them in the matter of religious worship, but it is with this salutary reserve: "If they will approve themselves no Papists or oppugners of the Trinity." And it may be worth while to consider well, whether there is any prudential reason, consistent with the safety of the established religion, why such a reserve should ever be dispensed with. But, indeed, till the Unitarian sect arose within these few years, not one among all the congregations of Protestant dissenters was affected by it.

Nevertheless, I must confess to you, that I am no advocate for penal statutes in religious cases, if sufficient security to the establishment could be obtained without them. For I would no more chastise a poor idolatrous Indian for falling down before his graven image (for he knows no better) than I would a Papist (though he might know better) for the same adoration of his crucifix, provided both be done in the sincerity of their hearts: but the mischief is, when they cannot be satisfied



tisfied with this indulgence, but must needs be tampering with those who are of a different persuasion, and cannot forbear from unsettling the faith of others who were going on quietly in the way of salvation. This it is which causes that restraint to be necessary, which has been put upon the members of that Church, and a necessary one it will continue to be, as long as their Priests will be endeavouring, by bribes or subtilty, to seduce the subjects of that Government which is willing to grant them every other liberty. Let them not call this religious persecution; it is only self-defence. And as we well *know of what spirit we are*, so as not to *call for fire from heaven to consume them*, surely they may rest quietly in the exercise of their own religion, without trying to subvert the faith, or wound the consciences of others.

As to all others who dissent from us, not so much in matters of faith, as in the use of some indifferent ceremonies, the toleration cannot be too extensive, provided they will not instil into the minds of their adherents such religious or civil principles as may cause dissensions in the Church, or discord in the State, which may end in the subversion of

the one, or schisms in the other. For whatever those dissensions which have arisen among us may be, yet there is but *one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism*, necessary to be known or believed unto salvation; and all these may perhaps have been fomented from their not sufficiently attending to that useful distinction which should never be forgotten, between Christian articles and theological conclusions; the former being the fundamental principles of religion, without which it cannot subsist; and the latter but the appendages of religion, with which the substance of it has no concern.

Why then will one say, *I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ?* Since we are one in faith, devoted to the same service, and in effect, listed under the same banner, why are we disunited in smaller matters? *Christ is not divided*; every branch of different opinion in these things, does not constitute a different religion; why then do we suffer the Gospel and its ordinances, which are in perfect harmony with themselves and one another, to become the engines of discord and contention? I cannot but think that a little more  
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comprehensive plan might include all within the pale of one communion; all well-meaning ones, at least, if they would but consult the Scripture, or be guided by it in some points of more material consequence, and would not, under the specious pretext of preserving the simplicity of the Gospel, rest their own and the salvation of their disciples upon irresistible grace, without the exercise of free-will; upon absolute decrees, without the necessity of satisfaction or atonement; and upon faith without works.

Such is the moderation with which I would advise you to treat all those who may dissent from the precepts or doctrines of the Church, in which it is your happy lot to bear a part of its ministry; yet not to give way to the seducers of your people, or suffer them, as far as you can prevent it, to *teach for doctrines things that they know not*. But the circumstances of the times in which we live, will shew you the necessity of acquiring some knowledge in these controversial points: and for your information in these, that you may not be at a loss to know where you may find it, I must refer you more especially to the careful reading of a book, which no young  
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divine ought to be ignorant of, I mean what is commonly called, *the London cases*, because it was composed of essays, written by a set of divines of London, with an intent of recovering those to the Church of England who dissent from it; comprehending both the Protestant dissenters and the Papists. If the original compilation is not to be had, it is usefully abridged by Dr. Bennet, under the title of, *an answer to the Dissenters Pleas for separation: or, an abridgment of the London Cases*.

Besides these necessary branches of sacred literature which I have already pointed out to you, beginning with the study of the *Holy Scriptures*, which must be carried on throughout the whole of your diligent enquiries, together with that *speculative* knowledge and *polemical* disquisitions, which are founded upon them, and can be understood by the help of them alone, explained as they are by the several commentators, which you may have an opportunity of consulting, or as you may see the list of them comprized in one view in those incomparable volumes of *Pool's Synopsis*; beside these, I say, you will now understand, that your knowledge, as you  
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*are a steward of the mystery of godliness, is not yet complete, unless you add to them the further knowledge of moral or practical divinity: for this is the substance of your public ministry, and, indeed, the ultimate design of its institution; not only to vindicate the doctrines, but likewise to enforce the precepts of its first divine teacher. Give attendance, says St. Paul to his son Timothy, to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*

You will consider, when you undertake the pastoral charge, that a more solemn or important trust cannot be committed to your care. It is no less a business than to teach rational creatures how they may best serve or worship the great God of the universe; and to guide immortal souls in the right way to their future eternal happiness. Such subject matters will not admit of a pompous levity, or a lukewarm indifference; much less will a superficial knowledge of the sacred writings, which delineate this rule of life, enable you to comprehend, or explain to others, the several arguments, persuasives, and motives to obedience, which will be the rule of God's judgments.—But this topic will require a separate consideration.

LETTER

## LETTER IV.

YOU know what our Saviour says, *Every scribe who is instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven; or, with Ezra, would prepare his heart to teach in Israel, is, or ought to be, like unto a man that is an householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasures things new and old.* Such is the fund which is necessary for the skilful preacher, who is not only to point out to his hearers the distinct branches of duty, but to urge them from sundry motives the most interesting, and in divers manners the most impressive; adapting his discourses, in the plainest terms, to the various circumstances, tempers, and apprehensions of the people; not merely to please, but to edify them; applying sometimes to their reason, and sometimes to their passions, with a discretion that may not offend the weak, or give advantage to the captious; but with an earnestness springing from his own native feelings, that may carry every doctrine home to the hearts of both, and fix it there.

I think



I think that Mr. *Addison* says somewhere in his *Spectator*, that a young man at his first beginning had better preach a good sermon of another's than an inferior one of his own: and Bishop *Burnet*, in his *Pastoral Care*, gives the same advice. I may grant this with some limitation; but if it be extended too far, it will become the fruitful source of idleness and ignorance. If a young man will satisfy himself with such a notion at large, because it comes from so great an authority, he will be apt to give himself no pains in a business which he will suspect may lessen his credit rather than raise it; for to what purpose, will he say, shall I try to exert my own abilities, when I may avail myself with better success of the abilities of others? All this is plausible enough, but it will deceive you. The Bishop thinks this advisable only for a time, till the young Clergyman is become capable of composing for himself. But when will this be? for the misfortune is, that it may, and probably will, disqualify him for this; for, after having accustomed himself to this lazy way of furnishing himself with the necessary materials for the discharge of his weekly duty, it is a question whether

whether he will ever bring himself, either by inclination or improvement, to compose at all.

Nothing but an early application to the rules and examples of good writing of any kind can acquire the habit either of style or manner; much less is the true pulpit-language as difficult as any other to be gained, but by a diligent attention to the manner, and a prudent imitation of style in those who have excelled in their performances of this kind. But if you will content yourself with barely transcribing, without attempting to imitate those, whom you may with the utmost propriety choose for the models of your own practice, there, I am afraid, you will stop; you will lose the whole exercise of invention, and with that, the art of invention itself: and it will be well if you do not, through mere indolence, impair the faculties, which, for want of employment, will contract a rust.

When I advise you to imitate the best writers you can choose, I do not mean that you should become a servile plagiarist, though your imitation may sometimes be close. He who has always been accustomed to walk  
with

with crutches, will scarcely ever be able to move without them; and he who habituates himself to pick out not only the words and phrases, but whole detached sentences from various authors to make up his own composition, will cramp the use of imagination and judgment, till he is not able to form one sentiment different from what he finds. Nevertheless, imitation is the end of reading the best authors; for this will lead you into the same train of reasoning and expression with them, and at length make it your own.

It was the opinion of a very good judge in this matter, (I think it was Dr. *Waterland*) that when a young Clergyman first sets himself about composing a sermon, he should read carefully, perhaps more than once, the most approved writer upon the subject he has chosen, and then laying the book aside, try to recollect as much as he can for his own use, which he will sometimes express in the very words, and sometimes in the sense only of his pattern. This custom, frequently repeated upon different subjects, will bring him into a habit of thinking as his author thinks; and, in time, of putting those thoughts into his own words; till at length,  
he



he will be able to form both his own sentiments and his own method into what may be called an original composition.

Some have thought that the abridging of sermons might teach young men to think afterwards for themselves. But this is so very near to transcribing wholly, that I believe it would be attended with the same consequences. There is, however, one method, not totally different from it, which a friend of mine once told me that he found great benefit from in his early days; and that was, by taking the heads of a discourse, and filling them up for himself: and, indeed, thus far I have often thought, that if a *syllabus* was made of the best sermons, by thus taking the heads of each, it would be an useful work for the assistance of a young beginner; for it would supply him not only with method, but with matter, for his thoughts to work upon.

It is certainly worth a young man's while to take some pains in this matter; for he must know from what he hears continually, that whenever any one who trusts wholly to the labours of another, is detected in using them, he forfeits his credit as a scholar among  
all

all ranks of hearers; and is ever after accounted no better than an idle and ignorant person, unable of himself to support the character which he has assumed; for disgrace immediately follows upon detection, and an incapacity of doing good upon disgrace. "It generally fares with this sort of thieves," says an excellent writer, (*Rapin* upon the eloquence of the Pulpit) "as with all others, they seldom leave off till they are discovered and brought to shame."

This is the general opinion of the world about it, and even the Clergy themselves will not spare the indolent offender; for this idea of ignorance and idleness is perpetually attached to the practice. In a country-congregation, indeed, it is allowable to take this liberty at times, lest the young beginner should be hurried too fast in preparing for his constant supply. But he must not wholly indulge himself in this, or trust too much to what may be put into his hands by another, who has been furnished perhaps with his materials, as warranted originals, by the deceitful friendship of a third, as ignorant of what he communicates as himself. If ever he be called forth into public, as is the lot

of most men at some time or other of his life, he is betrayed by the civility of his friend; or if ever his good fortune should throw a beneficial situation in his way, where he shall meet with a popular audience, which generally consists of some who have made themselves conversant in this kind of reading, he must either run the hazard of a discovery, which will mar his reputation, and hurt his feelings, or he must decline, through a consciousness of this deficiency, now not to be repaired, an offer that might have settled him with advantage in the world. It is good, therefore, for a young man to be prepared in time for either of these emergencies, which may happen when he least expected it; and *that* can be only by habituating himself from the first to such an employment as requires time and diligence before it can be brought to any tolerable perfection.

This early application to the work of composition, must still be attended with some prudential caution; for though it must be begun without loss of time, yet it must be carried on with deliberation and care. The plainest language is the best; but yet every word must be proper and significant, lest it  
either



either soar into bombast, or sink into vulgarism ; and if once you should become indifferent about the choice of your words, or the mode of expression, it will be the most difficult thing in the world to leave off a careless manner of writing when you have once been accustomed to it.

Since imitation will best enable you to write well, perhaps it may not be amiss to point out to you whom you had best propose for your patterns, according to the different plans, equally useful, which you may lay down for yourself in your different exercises of *exhortation or doctrine*. If you mean, by way of exordium, to explain your text, as it is connected with the context, you cannot consult any better guide for this purpose than Dr. *Clarke*, in his sermons of ten volumes ; for his skill in the style and phraseology of the Scriptures was superior to that of most men, and therefore “ his way of explaining them by collecting and comparing together all the parallel places truly relating to any subject, was so extraordinary and convincing, that such a delight and satisfaction went with it, as more than made amends for the defect of moving the passions, for which he was

senfible he had no talent." Bishop *Hoadley's* Life of him prefixed to his Sermons.

If you wish to divide the subject-matter of your discourse in the most methodical way, which is always the best means of being intelligible, and will prevent the too common fault of blending different sentiments together in one confused strain of elegy-writing, take Archbishop *Tillotson* for your pattern. Where he does not subdivide too much, which might be owing to the fashion of the time, he gives you a full and comprehensive view of every thing that could be suggested upon the topics of which he is treating. This makes his method clear, and his ideas distinct; his language is easy and yet elegant; perhaps, therefore, elegant, because it is easy; his sentiments are delivered in the most delicate simplicity; his reasoning is forcible, but not abstruse. In short, you meet with no hard, unusual, mean, far-fetched, or over-strained expressions; and not a word in his diction that you can say is unbecoming, or beneath the dignity of the Pulpit.

If your aim is to move the passions, which is in general by far the most useful way of preaching, because it is the most impressive,  
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you cannot do better than to make Bishop *Beveridge* the model of your discourses. It is his custom to urge every duty so much home upon the conscience, and to describe every sin so much in its native deformity, recommending the one upon the scripture-motives of happiness, and dissuading from the other upon the scripture-terrors of misery, that it is impossible not to attend to his familiar but nervous language, in the same spirit of unfeigned piety with which the author always thought and wrote.

Next to these, I must recommend Dr. *Rogers*, as a very eminent pattern of purity of language and sound divinity, as he himself had made the great Mr. *Hooker* his own pattern for strength of argument and clear reasoning upon every article of Ecclesiastical discipline, or Scripture-doctrine.

But it would be endless to mention all the excellent writers of sermons with which the English nation has abounded for a century past and more; I will therefore only add another to the list, omitting those who are still alive, lest it should appear, by naming them, to be somewhat of adulation. If then, you would improve yourself still further in the



truly instructive, pious, and pathetic manner of writing, with the peculiar easiness of expression, perspicuity of style, and strength of persuasion, which the Scripture holds forth as the unerring exemplar of Pulpit-eloquence, you will do well to make yourself thoroughly conversant in the numerous sermons of the late worthy Archbishop *Secker*, who had the happy art of exhausting every subject he undertook to write upon, with an unparelled simplicity of genuine devotion, which pleased all ranks of men, and which does honour both to his head and his heart.

But I would rather have you take the character of this admired preacher from the words of his learned editors, who have done justice to both, in the life which they have prefixed to his works. “ Few ever possessed in a higher degree the rare talent of touching on the most delicate subjects with the nicest propriety and decorum; of saying the most familiar things without being low, the plainest without being feeble, the boldest without giving offence.—His preaching was, at the same time, highly rational, and truly evangelical. He explained with perspicuity, he asserted with dignity, the peculiar characteristic-

ristic-doctrines of the Gospel. He inculcated the utility, the necessity of them, not merely as speculative truths, but as actual instruments of moral goodness, tending to purify the hearts, and regulate the lives of men; and thus, by God's gracious appointment, as well as by the inseparable connection betwixt true faith and right practice, leading men to salvation."

" These important truths he taught with the authority, the tenderness, the familiarity, of a parent instructing his children. Though he neither possessed nor affected the artificial eloquence of an orator, who wants only to amuse or to mislead; yet he had that of an honest man who wants to convince, of a Christian preacher who wants to reform and to save those that hear him. Solid argument, manly sense, useful directions, short, nervous, striking sentences, awakening questions, frequent and pertinent applications of Scripture, all these following each other in quick succession, and coming evidently from the speaker's heart, enforced by his elocution, his figure, his action, and above all by the corresponding sanctity of his example, stamped conviction on the minds of his hearers, and

sent them home with impressions not easy to be effaced. Accompanied as his sermons were with all the advantages of his delivery, it will appear, that the applause they met with, was founded no less on the matter they contained, than the manner in which they were spoken."

For the manner of elocution is another very material part of the preacher's care. It is a maxim in oratory, as old, if not older than the time of *Tully*, that if you would have your audience affected by what you say, you must first appear to be affected by it yourself. Whatever does not seem to come from the heart of the speaker will never reach the heart of the hearer. For this purpose it is not enough that you pronounce every sentence distinctly, but you must endeavour to lay a proper emphasis upon every word in that sentence. This you will be the most likely to do, when the composition is your own: you will *preach*, and not merely *read* it; and it may be easily discovered, when it is not your own, by this criterion. It is true, that the natural endowments of a good voice, and a quick ear, are required for accomplishing a good speaker, in this respect; but



but a great deal may be done with a moderate share of each.

True pronounciation consists in speaking the words properly, in speaking them distinctly, and in putting such a stress upon each, as they require. Now all this may be done, though the preacher is not so happy as to command a melodious voice, or a musical ear. For he who strives diligently with the natural powers he has, to accomplish thus much, will scarcely fail of becoming, in time, by enforcing his discourses with a pious persuasive earnestness, (which is in the power of most people) an useful preacher, and by a devout and pathetic manner, added to a Christian zeal for the improvement of his flock, (which all may gain if they will) may atone, in full measure, for the want of his natural endowments.

Where these are defective, or perhaps only not brilliant, some pains are requisite to remove the impediments; but it may be done. If we may believe history, *Demosthenes*, the most celebrated orator in the *Athenian* court, had some which he contrived by a constant attention to subdue. And the Christian orator, too, may be able to supply the same deficiencies,

ciencies, in a great degree, by a grave and solemn address to the feelings of his audience; neither too precipitate, nor too tedious; neither rapturous nor canting; neither pompous nor groveling: but yet, it may be vigorous and forcible, as such it will always command attention, and that will engage the affections of his hearers in his favour; they will be convinced that he is in earnest; that he sincerely believes the doctrines which he wishes them to believe; and that his instructions are therefore the result of a sincere concern for their welfare. *The effectual, fervent preaching of such an one, will avail much.*

If those who have the education of youth would bestow a little pains in modulating their voices to a proper tone, when they repeat their lessons, more especially in the prose-classes; and accustom them to speak their themes and declamations in the open school, with a becoming accent of voice, according to the different punctuation of sentences, and with an agreeable cadence, I am persuaded that the art of speaking in public would be attended with less difficulty, and young men would appear to better advantage than is often found; for here all the mischief  
begins.

begins. Nevertheless, if this should be neglected, as it is too often, there is, however, another method whereby nature may be greatly assisted, which is in every one's power to manage for himself, and will prove serviceable in more respects than one.—I mean that you should accustom yourself to repeat your own composition aloud in your study, before you deliver it in public, with as great careful attention to your manner of speaking correctly, as if your whole congregation heard you at the time. This practice, in which you may stop and correct yourself when you are inadvertently slipping into an improper way, will bring you by degrees to some exactness, as well as easiness in pronouncing; and will help you, which is by no means inconsiderable, to fill up your sentences in a manner suitable to your delivery, that a proper stress may be laid upon each part, as well as upon the whole of the period.

These things, which I have dwelt upon thus much, may at first sight appear to be of little consequence; but, upon weighing them well, you may find them to be considerable: they are, indeed, so considerable, as  
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to have employed the thoughts of some writers of eminence, especially, among others, *Rapin, upon the Eloquence of the Pulpit*; and Bishop *Burnet*, in the ninth chapter of his *Pastoral Care*. In truth, all the good effects of preaching will depend upon them.

*Strong meat*, says the Apostle, *belongeth to them that are of full age, even those, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*: but he who is a babe in Christ and unskilful in the word of righteousness, must be fed with milk, and not with strong meat. Therefore, to apply this, besides the duty of preaching, which is principally designed for the edification of the people at large, there is another office of your public function, which must by no means be neglected or omitted. I mean the instruction of the younger part of your charge, by catechising them. It is a duty commanded by God himself in several places of Scripture; and accordingly, in the primitive times of Christianity, every church had an officer called the catechist, whose sole business it was to instruct the catechumens, or children of believing parents, who were admitted as such as soon as they were capable of being

being instructed in the first rudiments or fundamental doctrines and duties of religion.

This duty has since devolved upon every parish-priest; and a form of catechism has been drawn up in the plainest and simplest terms that could be devised, for the comprehension and memory of those who were to receive and learn, *which be the first principles of the oracles of God?* In this respect, our Church-catechism is universally allowed to be the best that ever was composed from the days of *Cyri*l to this time; so admirably well calculated is it, by its familiar mode of questions and answers, for the purpose, that even the youngest children may fix it in their memory; and yet so full in the explanation of its doctrines and duties, that the more aged may find in it all things necessary to be known and practised in order to salvation.

The Rubric only directs “ that the Curate of every parish shall diligently upon Sundays and Holidays, after the second lesson, at the Evening prayer, openly in the church, instruct and examine so many children of his parish sent unto him, as he shall think convenient, in some part of the Catechism.”

But the sixty-ninth canon enjoins “ every  
Parson,

Parson, Vicar, or Curate, upon *every* Sunday and Holiday, to teach and instruct the youth and ignorant persons of his parish in the Catechism, under pain of a sharp reproof for the first omission, suspension for the second, and excommunication for the third." The Rubric is too vague, and the Canon too rigid. The circumstances of each parish must determine the Minister how to act in this respect. During the summer months it may be practised in every parish; and if, as is the case in many places, there be a sermon on one part of the day, and prayers only on the other, it will have its good effect, if on this part, he will add a short exposition of the Catechism, which will explain the meaning of its several articles, not only to the children, but to others; and may be the means of drawing more people to their attendance on the prayers, which, we well know, are too much neglected when there is nothing else accompanying them.—If there be sermons on both parts of the day, as is usual in the larger parishes, it may be more convenient when the days are long, to introduce this religious exercise towards the evening, which may instil into their minds a more devout



devout sense of the Sabbath-day, and keep many, even of the older people, from spending the latter part of this day in idleness and dissipation : as, in general, the Sunday-schools are an excellent preservative against the idleness of the younger, an institution which, it is to be hoped, every Clergyman will encourage as much as he can ; if you would furnish yourself with materials for this undertaking, you will do well to consult Archbishop *Wake*'s exposition of the Catechism, for your Scripture-proofs, and take Archbishop *Secker*'s incomparable lectures for your constant model.

## LETTER V.

UPON your entering into Priest's Orders, you are permitted, according to the custom of the Church, to pronounce the *Absolution* following the *Confession*, which is ordered by the Rubric to be pronounced by the *Priest alone*. Not that I understand this, as some have, in contradistinction to the word *Minister*, which was used before; for they are promiscuously used in the different Rubrics: and in the very next Rubric, the same person who is called Priest here is called Minister. But it means only that the Priest is to pronounce it by himself, and the people are not to join with him in repeating it, as they did in the confession. For whether this absolution be *declarative*, as some understand it, or *effective*, as others, yet as it is plainly a message from God to the people by the mouth of his servant, the people are to hear and receive it as such, but not to repeat after the Minister what it is his peculiar province to deliver to them.

From this direction alone then, it does not appear that there is any other reason besides custom, to restrain the Deacon from using it as well as the Priest. And, indeed, this was allowed formerly without any restriction; for, from the times of *Edward* and *Elizabeth*, to the time of *William* and *Mary*, the word Minister was used in this Rubric; and to shew that the compilers of the Liturgy intended no distinction of orders, it was determined in the proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, in 1689, "That the Absolution may be read by a Deacon, and that the word *Priest*, in the Rubric, should be changed into *Minister*." Howbeit, no great hurt can follow from such a restraint, provided it is not meant by it to give any exclusive power to the Priest, as if he were able of himself to absolve his people from their sins absolutely and decidedly, whenever he shall think fit. The Protestant Church disclaims all such power; and if our enemies would lay it to our charge, as they are apt to do, from such a custom as this, or from any thing contained in the words of our form, an explanation of both, as we understand it, may serve to remove the charge.

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There are three forms of absolution to be found in the service of our Common-Prayer: the first is this in the daily Morning Service; the second is used in the Visitation of the Sick; and the third, at the Communion. All these several forms, if we examine them fairly, are in sense and strictness of expression the same. In the first it runs thus:—  
 “Almighty God hath given power and commandment to his Ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins; *He* pardoneth and absolveth all them,” &c. No words can well express in stronger language the nature of that commission which is delegated to the Minister by virtue of his office in behalf of those who come within the terms of forgiveness, which are declared to be repentance and faith.

If a Prince should grant an authority to any one of his servants to release a penitent criminal out of prison in his name, it is the same, in effect, as to the prisoner's discharge, whether he be told that he is released by virtue of a special commission, under the hand and seal of the Prince, who has impowered him to say, that “*he* releases him;” or whether

ther it is said, I am authorised upon such and such conditions to say, still in pursuance of the same commission, “ I release you:” or whether it be thus expressed; “ The Prince pardon and release you, according to his promise,” which will comprehend all the three forms; for they all amount to no more than this: “ May Almighty God pardon you by me.” For thus the Greek church, from which the forms are borrowed, was used to express and explain it: “ Almighty God pardon you, by me his unworthy servant;” or, “ Lord, pardon him, for thou hast said, *Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted*: sometimes expressing, and always including God’s commission to his delegated vicegerent.—See Bishop Sparrow’s Rationale upon the Common Prayer.

Nothing can be more cautiously worded than the form of general absolution is: for it is throughout in the name of God; and the Priest has no other part in it than to declare and pronounce that it is God who will pardon and absolve all those that truly repent, and believe his holy Gospel, of which God alone, who knoweth the heart, can judge; and will not, nay cannot, transfer this pre-

rogative to another. It is therefore entirely out of the question to suppose that any man can take this authority to himself, or mean any more by that which is delegated to him, than a declaratory explanation of God's purpose towards repenting sinners. Accordingly, in the latter part of this form of absolution, to shew that the Priest does not take any more upon himself by virtue of his office than such a declaration to be conveyed through him, a precatory sentence is added in his own behalf, as well as that of the people, that God, in whose name he had been speaking, would grant both him and them true repentance and his holy Spirit, that they may not, by returning to their former sins, forfeit the blessing of the foregoing promise from heaven. But surely this would have been improperly added, if, as Mr. *Wheatley* contends, it had been meant to be *effective*. For if it were effective, why pray after it, that it might not be forfeited? And if it may be forfeited, how could it be effective? It was plainly, therefore, understood to be only *declaratory*, and as such we may still pray that we might be  
 assisted



assisted by the holy Spirit of God to make it effectual by our own conduct.

You will say, then, where is the necessity of ordaining Priests, if this customary distinction, as far as it relates to the reading or not reading the form of Absolution, be removed? I answer, for the administration of the Eucharist; unless you suppose that the words in the ordination of Priests, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," &c. conveys some authority in this respect to the Priest, superior to that which had been given to the Deacon: but if this, even in the first ages of the Church, meant no more than a ministerial or judicial authority (as might easily be proved, if we would enter into that controversy, concerning the *power of the keys*) it can then relate only to declaratory absolution in one case, or to reconciliation to the Church, after its censures had passed upon a delinquent, but now remitted in the other. The great difference between the offices of Deacon and Priest consists in the consecration of the elements of the Lord's Supper. For it was never allowed to Deacons to consecrate the Eucharist, but only to distribute it. The author of the *Constitutions*, "ap-

points the Bishop, if he be present, to deliver the bread to every communicant, saying, *the Body of Christ*; and the Deacon, in like manner, to deliver the cup, saying, *the Blood of Christ, the Cup of Life.*" (Constit. Apost. l. 8. c. 13.) The Council of *Nice*, (Can. 18.) says expressly, "the Deacons had no power to offer," meaning to consecrate, "for that it was the proper office of Presbyters." Herein is the great difference between Priests and Deacons, and still makes that function necessary to be entered upon, whether these be allowed to read the Absolution or not."— Besides this, they were never allowed to be instituted to any ecclesiastical preferment, where the cure of souls is annexed.—But this by the bye.

In the office for the *Visitation of the Sick*, the expression is stronger, and the exercise of the power seems to be made more personal. "By his (our Lord Jesus Christ's) authority committed to me, I absolve thee of all thy sins." But in this Mr. *Wheatley* himself confesses that the power of the Priest is only *ministerial*. For that this form of absolution is only designed to remit to the penitent the censures that might be inflicted by the Church upon

upon his sins, is evidently inferred from the expressions in the Collect that is appointed to be used immediately after it. For, in that prayer the penitent is said still most earnestly to desire pardon and forgiveness; which surely there could be no occasion to do, if he had been actually pardoned and forgiven by God, by virtue of the absolution pronounced before.

We meet with this formulary, "I absolve thee," no where but in this office, where it is evident that it relates only to private sins, confessed privately to the Minister for which the Rubric orders absolution to be given in this form; so that it seems best to resolve this too into a declarative or conditional absolution, which has been well explained by the example of the *legal* Priests, who are said to cleanse the leper, by *declaring* him to be clean\*, "Not," as St. *Jerom* says,

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"that

\* Dr. Macknight, in his Preliminary Essays to his translation of the Apostolical Epistles, has an excellent critical observation much to this purpose, which well explains the meaning of the Levitical law, and the power of the priest. "*Active verbs*," says he, "in some cases, were used by the Hebrews to express, not *the doing of the thing* said to be done, but simply, the *declaring that it is done*,  
or,



“ that the Priests made them leprous or unclean, but because they had the power of judging who were leprous or not leprous, and might discern who were clean or unclean. As therefore the Priest makes the leper clean or unclean; so here the Bishop or Presbyter binds or looses; not making them innocent or guilty, but according to the tenor of his office, when he hears the distinction of sins or sinners, he knows who is to be bound, or who to be loosed.”

Now this form, “ I absolve thee,” is understood to be no other than the *declaratory* absolution upon a special and particular case, when a man having confessed his sins, and given signs and indications of a true repentance, the Minister declares to him, that as far as he can judge by the rule of God’s word his repentance is true; and therefore by virtue thereof he declares him absolved by God; but if there be any allusion or deceit in the man’s heart, which no mortal can

or, *that it shall be done*. Thus, both in the Hebrew and in the Septuagint translation of Levit. xiii. 6, 8, 11, &c. the priest is said *to cleanse* and *to pollute*. But the meaning evidently is, that after due examination, he is to *declare* the person *clean* or *polluted*.” Prel. Essays, p. 75.

judge

judge of, then, notwithstanding this favourable sentence, and judgment of the Priest, God will judge him over again, and rectify the error of the keys by his unerring judgment." *Bingham's App.* to the 8th vol. of his *Antiquities*.

I think there can be no doubt about the meaning of that absolution which we meet with in the Communion Service; it is evidently *precatory*, and is put into the form of a prayer to shew that this is an ingredient which always accompanies all kinds of absolution, whether they be *declaratory*, *imprecatory*, or *applicatory*, as they are distinguished by writers upon this subject; for all these are equally exercised by virtue of power and authority communicated by God to his *ambassadors* as the *ministers of reconciliation* under him. Only in all these absolutions they must observe, that the efficacy of them depends upon certain rules or conditions, without which their absolution will avail nothing in the court of Heaven, and they are repentance and amendment.

In the Communion-service, the form of absolution is a plain and direct prayer for pardon and forgiveness. The Priest intercedes

cedes for those who “acknowledge and bewail their manifold sins and wickedness; who do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for their misdoings; the remembrance of which is grievous unto them, and the burthen of them upon their consciences is intolerable:” who therefore pray unto the most “merciful Father to have mercy upon them; that for his son Jesus Christ’s sake, he would forgive them all that is past, and grant that they may ever hereafter serve and please him in newness of life.” This cannot well be mistaken: for this confession and this prayer the Priest is directed to pursue in another, which consists partly of a declaration of God’s promises to pardon true penitent sinners, and partly of an intercession with God for actual pardon to these particular sinners, who seem to be thus earnest in petitioning for it upon the Gospel-terms, and for whom accordingly he then makes his application and address to the throne of grace; which intercession with God for sinners of this description was always looked upon as the principal act of sacerdotal power in the business of evangelical absolution. And yet, when the Priest intercedes with God for these things, he is said,



said, in his way, to *give* absolution and blessing; because it is the means in the hand of man whereby God is pleased to derive and send down the blessing of his absolution upon his penitent and devout worshippers. For they are the conditions of the Gospel, without which salvation is not to be obtained; and therefore God's promises of pardon are thus declared to us, and applied to our souls, in order to excite our hopes, invigorate our faith, and engage us the more effectually to a sincere repentance and holy obedience.

If we consider the whole in this light, which I take to be the true one, those who dissent from us, upon this account among others, must acknowledge, that this stumbling-block at least will be removed; and when we are told, as we are continually, that we assume an authority which both they and we reprobate in the practice of the Church of Rome, they may see that we differ widely from that, and only retain a sense of our absolving power, which can give offence to no community of men, who wish, as all good Christians must, to preserve the unity of faith in the bond of peace.

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If, however, on the other hand, what I have said should give offence to any of our own communion, and it shall still be thought that the Deacon ought to be restrained from using the form of absolution, though it be understood to be only *declaratory*, I shall very readily, upon conviction, retract what I have said upon that point. If it will preserve any reverence for that part of the ministerial function, in God's name, let the restraint be adhered to. I contend for nothing but the utmost regard to be shewn to the several forms of our most excellent Liturgy; and I can foresee no harm to follow from allowing or not allowing the Deacon to exercise such an authority. But I must still maintain, as far as I can judge, that all our forms of absolution are *declaratory* or *imprecatory*, (for I have nothing to do here with the *judicial* absolution) because it is God alone, properly speaking, who blesses and pardons; the Minister is only his substitute or vicegerent, acting in his name, and by his authority.

“ But when we have paid the greatest outward reverence imaginable to these ordinances, there is one thing still behind to make them effectual, which, if it be wanting,  
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all the absolutions in the world will avail them nothing; and that is, the internal qualifications of their own hearts and souls by an unfeigned repentance, and sincere obedience; without which all the rest are but mere forms that cannot completely operate whilst men put in bars and impediments against them. For all absolutions are conditional, and suppose repentance and obedience before they confer any real benefit on the sinner. The Minister can only lend his mouth or his hand toward the external act of an absolution; but he cannot absolve internally, much less the unqualified sinner." *Bingham's Sermons*, at the end of the 8th vol.

I might now finish my addresses to you; but as there are still some particulars remaining with respect to your outward deportment in life, you will excuse me if I dwell a little upon these, which, however insignificant they may appear at first sight, may nevertheless establish or forfeit the esteem of the world, and therefore cannot be insignificant in themselves, or their consequences.

LETTER



## LETTER VI.

**Y**OU must be sensible that as there is some prudence to be shewn in the choice or management of the subjects of your public preaching, that it may be adapted to the circumstances or wants of your hearers, and yet without giving offence; so there is as much circumspection required in the conduct, both public and private, of your life and conversation among them. For he who preaches against the vices or folly which he is seen to practise, reproves his own life. The preacher who would persuade others to become virtuous or religious, must be virtuous and religious himself; otherwise let him preach like an angel, yet it will be to little or a bad purpose, for he only bears witness to his own hypocrisy, and will sooner lose his own soul than save another's.

In this guilt he may involve himself not only by an openly vicious example, but even by an unguarded one, when it is indispensibly necessary for him to distinguish, and that

accurately, between what is *lawful*, and what is *expedient*; lest any harmless liberties which he may unwarily take should, by any possible misconstruction, encourage others to take sinful ones. For you must know, that much more exactness is expected from those of the sacred character, and, indeed, much more ought to be shewn, than from other men; and you cannot but be sensible too, that much less allowances are made for their failings, as if they were more than men.

In this, however, we ought to comply, as it is expected that we should: the restraints are but small, and the mischief may be great. Our situation is like that of a *city placed upon an hill*, exposed alike to the critical observation of those who mean us well, and of those who wish us ill; the latter watching for our miscarriages with an evil eye; and the former *jealous over us with a godly jealousy*. A spot in our garment is quickly discoverable either by the one or the other; it is not to be hid: well is it for us, if with all our care and pains we can escape calumny, we cannot always command esteem; be it our endeavour, nevertheless, to deserve it.

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There is a wide difference between too rigid a stiffness, and too easy a compliance; between moroseness and levity. There is no good reason why a clergyman, as such, should debar himself of all the innocent amusements of life; but I must think, and I believe, so will you, that there is a levity in excess in giving himself up to a total dissipation, in making a point of attending at every public diversion which is announced; and not only that, but even in taking upon himself the chief management of them, as if no distinction were to be kept up between the clerical and lay-character. I do not say that such things are criminal, but they are injudicious; they lower the character in the opinion of all men, and they certainly give offence even to the moderate and serious members of those communities who dissent from us; for they will take advantage to themselves from drawing the parallel between their conduct and our own. There is more mischief arising from this, than many are aware of; and if they were, I am persuaded that they would correct themselves in this trifling indulgence, lest the ministry should be blamed.

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There is another grievance, I may call it, of the present age, which I cannot help guarding you against; and that is, the fashion of laying aside as far as they possibly can, or dare, the clerical dress, as well as the clerical character. Every one who has made the least observation, must know, that a clergyman, dressed as such, commands respect from the laity, even from his outward appearance, in every orderly company; and if so, what can be the possible reason why any one should choose to appear in as little of it as he well may, even at the hazard of hearing some reproach, nay ridicule, from those who in their hearts lay but very little stress upon the function itself? It is certainly matter of some importance, and these very men are much displeased if they fail of it, to keep up this outward respect; and if so trifling a circumstance as a proper decency in apparel will preserve it, surely they must be lost to all sense of propriety, as well as feeling, who will run the hazard of forfeiting it by an affectation of singularity, which discovers in them a contempt of their own order. How this can be reconciled with the principles of common sense, plain reason, or becoming

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decorum, which they would take amiss not to be supposed to have, is more than I am able to comprehend.

Among the Constitutions, and Canons Ecclesiastical, annexed to our larger editions of the Common-Prayer, there are two, among many others, which ought to be known and observed, the 74th and 75th, relating to the appearance and behaviour of the Clergy in these two respects. I do not mean to urge a strict conformity to their injunctions; they might be necessary when they were made, but they are such as cannot well be complied with at this time; but the main purpose of them is easily seen, and ought not to be dispensed with at any time; I mean as far as they may still be understood to imply a cautious regard to the too common or habitual frequenting of places where dissipation alone is professed, and a total neglect of the distinguishing badge, consisting in decent apparel, by which a Clergyman rises superior even in common estimation to the appearance of the common mass.

Nothing can be more disreputable, to say the least of it, than the sight of an idle Clergyman. For as learning does not come by inspiration,

inspiration, to see one who pretends to teach others what they ought to believe, and how they ought to live, using no means of informing himself by any application or study, or of improving his time for the benefit of others who have not the same leisure, is a most contemptible object in the opinion even of the lowest class, inasmuch as nothing but ignorance can arise from idleness; and therefore it is concluded, with a total indifference to his religious ministration, that nothing can be learned from him who wants the instruction which he pretends to convey. These are dreadful negligences, and such as the incautious Clergy will stand answerable for at a higher tribunal than that of man.

I am not an enemy to relaxation of any kind that may not give offence, but when this is made the chief employment of time, to the utter neglect of every other employment, this is no longer to be called relaxation, it is indolence, and becomes criminal, especially in one of the sacred profession. Indeed, in every other profession you will seldom find it, and with good reason, because not only their credit but their support or advancement may depend upon their diligent application to



the studies of their calling, without some opinion of which, made visible, no one will trust the decision of his property or the safety of his life; whereas when once a young Clergyman has got possession of a preferment that will supply all his wants, and with no ambition to advance further, he is apt to relax too much; and if others who see this will not entrust the salvation of their souls to his guidance, it may be a matter of indifference to him, and he may say, that they must look to the consequences; but what these are, it will make any thinking man to shudder when he reflects upon them, and knows too that they are laid to his charge.

It must be confessed, indeed, that the clerical profession has one discouragement peculiar to itself. In other professions pains and industry are sure of success; whereas a man may *labour in the word and doctrine* to the end of his days without the least regard paid to his merit or his services in the vineyard. It may be so; but yet such an one has a consolation likewise far above all others that *the world can give*: he has discharged his duty, and that will be attended with a reward which *the world cannot take away*. His conscience is  
satisfied,

satisfied, and after he has secured that point, it matters very little, especially after a certain period of life, whether his diligence has been considered properly or not.

But passing by these considerations, as of little weight in the scale of comparative merit or reward, a regular and exemplary behaviour in a Clergyman will not only procure respect to himself within his narrow sphere, and regard for his ministerial functions wherever he performs them, but it will even qualify him for the more successful discharge of them. That it will have its due effect upon his public instructions there is no doubt: and, that without it private admonition must be done away, is as clear; which yet he promises to *use both in public and private*, in express words at the *Priest's Ordination*.

This duty of private admonition, you must know, is of great consequence, for it is what you promise to observe when you take upon you the priesthood, and it is upon many accounts found necessary; I wish it were not so often necessary as it is; but in every parish there will be some who are negligent in the worship of God; these want to be exhorted: there will be others who are apt to run into

riot and excess ; these want to be admonished : and there will be others again, who without any naturally vicious principle, give themselves up to the pleasures of the world in a total dissipation of time, and in an utter exclusion of every serious or religious thought, these want to be awakened. The Minister, who would undertake, as is his duty, to reclaim these men from any of their pernicious habits, must *tell them of their faults between them and him alone* ; but with what face, or to what purpose will he pretend to attempt this, who has made himself liable by the irregularity or heedlessness of his own conduct, to have every accusation retorted upon him, and with double violence, upon account of his profession. For though the sins of one man are not lessened by the bad example of another, yet he who sets the example, becomes a *partaker of other men's sins*, and must share in the disgrace that follows upon them.

It is no uncommon thing, though it will avail them little, for men to justify the guilt of their own transgressions by the suspicious example of a transgressing pastor, boldly presuming that they may be allowed to venture further, than he dares to go, and still be justified,



tified. If those suspicions cannot be proved to be groundless, he cannot condemn them for their presumption. *Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* will be a bitter sarcasm upon the life of a Clergyman, and defeat all his advice, when it comes from the mouth of a parishioner who may have been notoriously irregular in his conduct, but now begins to feel the wounds of his conscience, and cannot look up to him for the cure; and it will be most grievously embittered, when he comes to reflect, that the very advice which he ought to give, rebounds upon him from a striking consciousness, with self-reproof, and self-condemnation.

“ Such a man’s whole life,” says an eminent prelate upon this subject, “ has been a course of hypocrisy in the strictest sense of the word, which is the acting of a part, and the counterfeiting another person. His sins have in them all possible aggravations; they are against knowledge, and against vows, and contrary to his character; they carry in them a deliberate contempt of all the truths and obligations of religion; and if he perishes, he does not perish alone, but carries a shoal down with him, either of those who have

perished in ignorance, through his neglect, or of those who have been hardened in their sins through his ill example. And since all this must be put to his account, it may be justly inferred from hence, that no man can have a heavier share in the miseries of another state, than profane and wicked *Clerks*. On all these things he ought to employ his thoughts frequently, who intends to dedicate himself to God." *Burnet's Pastoral Care*, p. 129.

Nevertheless, it is in a great measure, in every one's power to procure due esteem to himself, at least to prevent contempt, since an exemplary and religious conduct, a faithful and constant attention to the work of his calling, will never fail to secure thus much. The world is not so far degenerated into a lukewarmness for religion as to despise its Ministers merely as such. If they meet with it, I am afraid it is because they deserve it. A prudent, conscientious, and diligent parish-priest, actuated by a true sense of his duty, will have no reason to complain for want of regard to his merit, though he sometimes may for want of success in his ministry. He will find many who will look up to him, though

though they will not follow him; and even when they are not influenced by his example, yet in their hearts they will revere it. Even the most dissolute will be restrained in his presence; and though they will not be persuaded to alter their conduct, yet they will deign to apologise for it.

There is a certain degree of dignity attached to the Priesthood, if it be not sullied by remissness, which will claim some veneration for *its work's sake*. Convince a man that *you watch for his soul*, as one *that must give account*, and you may leave it to himself to judge whether he shall or shall not *esteem you very highly in love for your work's sake*. For his own sake, rather; for however abandoned he may have been, he cannot but, in his own conscience be *kindly affectioned* to him, who, from the most disinterested principle, expresses a tender zeal to rescue him from endless misery, and an earnest desire to put him in the right way to everlasting happiness. This is the end of all our labours, and the serious Christian will *lay it to his heart*.

Here I might take my leave of you; but as you may expect that I should furnish you  
with



with a small library for the direction of your studies, and improvement of your time, I will venture to recommend a few select books to you, which if carefully read and digested, will inform you better than five hundred run over cursorily, and as soon forgotten. Your own intercourse with others will gradually supply you with more.

A knowledge of the Scriptures is the first thing needful, especially those of the New Testament, for there, and there only, the terms of salvation which we preach are to be found; and therefore, in order to understand these well, some commentators must be consulted. In the critical part, I know of none better than *Hammond* or *Whitby*; and for the harmony, commentary, and short notes, *Doddridge* will prove most useful; having, besides others, this advantage, that his improvements, as he calls them, will suggest many pious hints, which may be enlarged upon in your own compositions.

But because it will be necessary to be acquainted with the historical parts of the Old Testament, as well as of the New, you cannot choose better for such information, than *Stackhouse's* history of the Bible, which ex-  
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tends to both Testaments. His notes will supply you with a great fund of critical knowledge, collected from the best commentators; and though it has been objected to him, that he has stated his objections in too strong a light, yet this is quite done away by the satisfactory answers which he has given from the ablest polemical writers; and his Dissertations throw great light upon the geography, chronology, and other obscure articles relating to the ancient customs and usages of the Jewish and other nations; useful enough to know, but may be passed over at pleasure. I must add to these *Pool's Synopsis*, to be occasionally consulted as you go along, which is an epitome of all the best German and English critics of the time, which he has collected into one view, in such a manner, that upon comparing them all at once, you may form a judgment for yourself, and give the preference to that which appears to be the most satisfactory. All these are the means of understanding with precision the true meaning of the sacred writers, which is the first essential in the progress of the theological scholar.

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But this is not all: a thorough view of the nature and conditions of the covenant of grace, and the evidences, both external and internal, upon which the Christian faith is grounded, must next be examined and ascertained. For this purpose, *Grotius's* little book *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, with his notes upon it, ought almost to be got by heart; *Jenkin's* Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion; *Conybeare's* and *Chandler's* Defence of Christianity, contain all that you can want to know upon this subject; and in *Stillingfleet's* *Origines Sacrae*, which no one ought to be ignorant of, the whole controversy both of atheism and deism, the arguments in favour both of the Old and New Testament are fully displayed, with a great variety of close reasoning and learning against the cavils and objections of the Infidel and Deist.

The prophetical parts of Scripture may be reckoned among the most difficult parts of it, and therefore you will want some clue to guide you in these researches. *Bishop Newton's* Dissertations on the Prophecies, as far as they go, will, in an easy and familiar style, shew you the meaning and fulfilment of many  
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ancient prophecies, confirmed by the testimony of ancient and modern historians and travellers, which, without such assistance, might have appeared dark and unintelligible. To which you may add, as a fund of learning, Sir *Isaac Newton* on the Prophecies, *Drew Cressner* on the Prophecies of *Daniel* and St. *John*, and *Lowman* on the *Revelation*.

The most important enquiry of this kind is, how these prophecies relate to the nature, office, and person of the Messiah, whose pretensions to that high title are chiefly supported by the concurrent testimonies of the Old and New Testament, which serve to corroborate the truth of each other. Bishop *Kidder's* Demonstration of the Messiah, and Dean *Prideaux's* Connection of the Old and New Testament, are two excellent books for such an investigation, besides a variety of other knowledge which is to be found in both, especially in the latter. On this point too, *Chandler's* Vindication is excellent.

The doctrinal parts of the Christian religion are summarily comprehended in the Creeds which our Church has adopted into its service. Next to the Holy Scriptures, therefore,

therefore, these must be well considered; and if you wish, as you ought, to understand them thoroughly, you need have no better help than Bishop *Pearson's* Exposition of the *Apostle's* Creed, and Bishop *Bull's* Latin works in defence of the *Nicene* Faith. I know not any that I can recommend upon the *Athanasian*, for Dr. *Waterland's* history of it is far beneath himself; so that I have long thought that a complete commentary upon it proved, as I am persuaded every article may be by Scripture, and the primitive writers, is one, among others, of the *desiderata* in divinity.

In some of the intercourses of your life, you may probably have occasion to examine into the controversies between Protestants and the Church of *Rome*, in which the essentials of religion are concerned, as well as the controversies between Protestants themselves, those, I mean, of the established Church, and the different sectaries who dissent from it, in which the circumstantial of religion are chiefly concerned. At least you must be guarded against attacks from both quarters; and the best armour of defence that you will meet with for the combat, may be found

found in that admirable collection of tracts already recommended to you, called the *London Cases*, wherein such accurate answers have been given to all their pleas for separation, with that perspicuity of style, and that strength of argument, which is calculated to give you the fullest instruction in these matters that is to be found in any book I know. To this, however, I must add another very useful work, not so generally, or so well known as it ought to be; I mean the works of the Reverend *Charles Leslie*, in two volumes folio, which comprehend all that can be said to confute all the arguments of Socinians, Fanatics, or Papists, and, indeed, of every sect that has arisen in the Church or nation; for they contain an inexhaustible fund of theological knowledge.

I have not yet said any thing about reading the primitive fathers, or of ecclesiastical history, for I do not pretend to give you a complete body of divinity; and perhaps you may think these to be rather the objects of your riper years. But you will naturally suppose that the best interpretations of Scripture will be found in those who lived the nearest to the

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the time of its first promulgation, when the sense of it must have been best understood; and therefore if your inclination should lead you this way, you will quickly perceive that it is well worth your pains to acquaint yourself a little with both. If you will read *Cave's Lives of the Fathers*, you may be tempted, by his faithful account of their lives and their works, to search farther into those valuable remains of antiquity. You may select, as you please, for many learned men have published some detached parts of their works for the convenience of young students, when the whole of them would be too voluminous.

Archbishop *Wake* has translated the epistles of the apostolical fathers into English; Bishop *Pearson* bestowed great pains upon the genuine epistles of *Ignatius*; the learned *Wotton* published a Latin translation, with many useful notes, of *Clement's* epistles to the *Corinthians*; Dr. *Ashton* did the same with *Justin Martyr's* two apologies; Dr. *Thirlby* with his dialogue with *Trypho*; St. *Chrysostom* on the Priesthood, has been translated over and over, especially by *Hughes*. There is no end of  
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mentioning all the selections of this kind; what I have mentioned I would recommend to your notice, as they fall within a small compass, and leave you to choose others for yourself, as you advance in your studies.

As to Ecclesiastical History, you may content yourself for some time with the perusal of *Mosheim's* compendium of it translated by *Maclaine*; for this will give you the state of literature, as well as the state of the Church, in every age of it, from the Apostles' time to the present century, in a very judicious and candid manner.

I need say nothing more to you than I have already, about the reading of sermons; that will come of course, and frequently. But our English language abounds so much with very excellent ones, that I shall leave you to choose for yourself; you can hardly choose amiss among those of any character; and none of your time will be spent better than in the perusal of some of them constantly, both for instruction and imitation.

I should not have troubled you thus often with my letters, if I had not an affectionate regard for your appearance in the world, and

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an earnest desire of your not being led away by the fashionable taste of the present age. If you can reap any benefit from what I have ventured to write, I shall have my end.

Adieu!



FINIS.



